

Regarding the Sangha, we should be respectful towards our Dharma friends, and share our understanding, experience, time, and worldly possessions with them.

e) The distinction based on recollection

In order to be able to sincerely take refuge in the three Jewels we should repeatedly recall their different good qualities. This will naturally cause us to trust and follow them.

f) The distinction based on how to increase merit

As explained during the presentation of the four noble truth (karma – Handout 17 & 18, autumn 2011), the most powerful recipients of positive or negative actions are Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, our spiritual guides, Bodhisattvas, other beings who have spiritual realizations, and our parents. However, positive actions such as taking refuge in or making offerings to the three Jewels increases our merit in different ways.

There is a difference between engaging in virtuous actions towards actual living beings, such as the Buddha and the Sangha, as opposed to towards the Dharma. Therefore, there are two aspects to accumulating merit: (1) the merit one receives due to ones motivation and action, and (2) the merit one receives due to benefitting the recipient. Benefiting Buddhas and Bodhisattvas whose primary objective is the enlightenment of all sentient beings, indirectly also benefits sentient beings.

Furthermore, there is a difference between accumulating merit towards a single person as opposed to a multitude of people which is why one receives more merit when making offerings to *all* Buddhas. There is also a difference in terms of how highly realized the recipient is, which is why it is more meritorious to accumulate merit towards the Buddha than the Sangha. Regarding the Sangha, there is also greater merit when engaging in virtue directed towards Aryas than directed towards ordinary monastics.

3. The way to take refuge through commitment

Taking refuge through commitment refers to entrusting oneself in the three Jewels by acknowledging the Buddha as the perfect guide and teacher who knows the infallible method to attain Buddhahood. Since he is the only one who can take us to enlightenment we should commit ourselves to rely on him from the depth of our heart.

The Dharma refers to the goal of Nirvana and enlightenment. Therefore, we should commit ourselves to acknowledging the Dharma as the *actual* refuge and protection.

Since the Sangha share the same goal as us and since they assist us on our spiritual journey we should profess our commitment by acknowledging them as our true spiritual friends.

4. The way to take refuge by refusing to acknowledge other refuges

This means that one should not take refuge in a teacher or a teaching that contradicts the three Jewels. Furthermore, one should not take ultimate refuge, i.e. take refuge for the purpose of attaining liberation or enlightenment, in anyone other than the three Jewels. The reason for the latter is that if one takes such refuge one may be lead towards worldly activities and goals, and move away from overcoming suffering. However, it is admissible to rely on worldly gods, spirits, and other beings to assist us with temporary objectives just as we rely and take refuge in physicians in order to get treated for a disease, or rely on college professors in order to get a degree.

This completes the section "Taking refuge in the Three Jewels" from the ***Lam Rim Chenmo***. Next follows a presentation of the three objects of refuge based on two texts by the great Tibetan adept Panchen Sonam Drakpa. They are the two main texts traditionally used by Drepung Loseling Monastery, Ganden Shardze Monastery, the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics, etc. during the study and debate of the various topics explained in the commentary on the ***Perfection of Wisdom Sutras***, Maitreya's ***Abhisamayaamlamkara (Ornament for Clear Realizations)***.

The two texts are:

(I) General Meaning

Tibetan: ཚි བ ཀ ལ - *Chi toen* (*Chi* = general/universal, *toen* = meaning)

This text gives general explanations, divisions, definitions, etc. of each topic

(II) Decisive Analysis

Tibetan: མ ག ར ཉ ག ཉ - *Thachoe* (*Tha* = decisive/final/limit, *choe* = analysis/investigation)

This text analyzes and debates the different aspects of each topic. It gives precise definitions and refutes definitions and other assertions that are logically incorrect.

The presentation of the three objects of refuge according to the *General Meaning*:

The reason for expounding on the three objects of refuge after presenting the four noble truths is to understand that the three objects of refuge are the basis of Mahayana practice (or literally: "that Mahayana practice possesses as its basis the three objects of refuge".)

The **General Meaning** expounds the topic of the three objects of refuge by way of five subtopics:

1. The necessity for the scriptures' presentation of *three* objects of refuge
2. Identifying the nature (i.e. meaning) of the three objects of refuge
3. The difference between conventional and ultimate refuge
4. The meaning of the word 'Jewel'.
5. How one should take refuge

1. The necessity for the scriptures' presentation of *three* objects of refuge

The necessity for positing three objects of refuge is threefold:

- I. The necessity for positing the Buddha Jewel as an object of refuge
- II. The necessity for positing the Dharma Jewel as an object of refuge
- III. The necessity for positing the Sangha Jewel as an object of refuge

I. The necessity for positing the Buddha Jewel as an object of refuge

The Buddha Jewel is an object of refuge because Buddhas serve as the *resultant* objects of refuge of Bodhisattvas. Furthermore, Buddhas are the *causal* objects of refuge of Bodhisattvas, Hearers, and Solitary Realizers, for they teach them the paths. The Buddha Jewel is also posited as an object of refuge because Buddhas are the (*causal*) objects of refuge for those who have not entered a path yet and who regard Buddhas as a supreme object of worship.

In other words, the Buddha Jewel is posited as an object of refuge because, of the three Jewels, it is the *main* resultant object of refuge of Bodhisattvas and the causal object of refuge of the three, Bodhisattvas, Hearers, and Solitary Realizers. Furthermore, the Buddha Jewel is also the causal object of refuge for those who have not entered a path yet but possess the Mahayana inclination, Hearer inclination, or Solitary Realizer inclination.

II. The necessity for positing the Dharma Jewel as an object of refuge

The Dharma Jewel is an object of refuge because the Dharma serves as the *resultant* object of refuge of Solitary Realizers who have taken their last birth in Samsara and who wish to attain Nirvana without depending on a teacher. Furthermore, the Dharma Jewel is the (*resultant*) object of refuge for those who have the Solitary Realizer inclination but who have not entered a path yet and who regard the holy Dharma as supreme.

Therefore, the Dharma Jewel is an object of refuge because, of the three Jewels, it is the *main* resultant object of refuge of Solitary Realizers and of those who possess the Solitary Realizer inclination but who have not entered the path yet.